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AUTHOR Sandel, Lenore
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines literature on early intervention programs for disadvantaged and culturally diverse children from the 1960s to the present. The focus is on Project Head Start and its history, follow-through support programs in the primary grades, and current research on emergent literacy. The background of Project Head Start is provided, and follow-through support programs are discussed, the aims of which are to emphasize the same goals as Head Start and adjust learning experiences that reinforce the early gains. The importance of continuity between Head Start programs and primary grade experiences is emphasized. Parent involvement is described as an effective element in the development of a child's early relationships, interests, and language. Current literature on emergent literacy and the role of experience in a child's development are considered. Theoretical principles of emergent literacy curricula, activities, and objectives are stated. The correlation of the whole language approach and emergent literacy with the cumulative research on child development and learning has cogent potential for application with programs and social policy. Appended are 21 references. (GLR)

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HEAD START TO FULL START: A PROGRESSION OF GAINS IN FULFILLING CHILDREN'S PRESCHOOL NEEDS

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Lenore Sandel, Ed.D.
Hofstra University
Hempstead, N Y 11550

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Head Start to Full Start...A Progression of Gains in Fulfilling Children's Preschool Needs

The theoretical framework of Project Head Start was documented on July 28, 1964, in "...The first work of these times", The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The initial purposes of compensatory programs were to prepare preschool children with learning experiences for the formal school years which were structured on development and experiential prerequisites. Provision for Preschool Training Programs was recognized through earlier demonstrations of successful demonstrations of successful interventions. One support for the authorization by Congress of the 1965 law to benefit educationally deprived children came from Ypsilanti, Michigan where longitudinal gains were reported for the experimental group of 3- and 4-year old children in the initial 1962 Perry Preschool Project. The project was cited as a model by the Division of Compensatory Education, USOE in 1969. [Perry, 1969] A longitudinal study published by High/Scope in 1984 as "Changed Lives", revealed permanent gains of that program to participants at age 19.

Operation Head Start was planned to give young children with less than an adequate chance a head start for their school years. Hubert H. Humphrey, as Vice-President of the United States, termed the bill, "Operation Catch-Up". Communities were responsible for submitting plans to meet their specific needs. More than fifty percent of the community action

programs proposed to conduct year-long preschool programs for young children.

The goals and programs from the beginning were guided by research and practice related to preschool teaching and learning. In addition to the traditional nursery school materials and activities, programs for disadvantaged or culturally different children were provided with opportunties to use materials in different ways and for different purposes. Head Start children required more than enrichment and extension of experience. Their needs confirmed in a review of research, include [a] the basic cognitive skills that they had not developed, [b] the basic experiential background of a shared culture and [c] the basic social and organizational skills of school associations and materials in the group situations. These needs, essentially listed in an early reference as "characteristics and needs of preschool children" [Andrew, 1946] include companionship of other children; cooperative play with a wide variety of games, motor and manipulative activities; security within the family; the ability to communicate readily through speech to achieve relationships with other children; and opportunities to do things for himself. [p. 1] Similar factors for school-entry at age 5, are recognized in the schedules amd objectives of the model compensatory preschool programs. One terminal objective of the Perry [1969] program becomes the rationale of Head Start: "to foster a positive change in intellectual growth which would lead to academic success and and social adjustment in the elementary grades". [p. 6]

An exemplary preschool program in Champaign, Illinois [1969], records " the most noticeable characteristic of the children after 2 years of

instruction as their confidence in their abilities to meet a challenge" [p. 20]

"Follow-through support programs to maintain children's gains followed Head Start. An alert to a posssible "False Start" [Butler,1965] suggested that the primary grades should emphasize the same goals as the Head Start program and adjust learning experiences which reinforce the early gains. The recommendation at the end of the first year of Head Start, was to individualize goals for every child with emphasis on self-discipline; positive self-concept; intellectual concepts of the world of things; language development and the creative expression of ideas. [pp.163-66]

Research directed to the failure of Head Start focused on this lack of continuity in the school experiences. A recommendation from the Preschool Program in Fresno, California [1967] at the end of a continuation study, guards against "False Start" in expressing "a felt need for a greater articulation of the preschool and kindergarten programs if the latter is to capitalize adequately on the gains achieved in preschool". [p.11]

One Follow-Through Research Project in Napa, California [Robbins, 1986] provided a 3-year comprehensive staff development program with teacher training in classroom management strategies and instructional practices. The quantitative data indicated gains in children's achievement, including bilingual students, at all levels of ability. Noted were qualitative outcomes as teacher collaboration, improvement of teaching skills, and student
independence with provided teacher direction through teachers' new views and approach. A longitudinal study revealed that Head Start children did

maintain educationally substantive gains and cognitive/analytic ability. [Lee, 1990]. In New York State, Head Start was examined after two decades. [Heller, 1985]

Parent involvement as a factor in several model programs [NIE, 1978] is supported by Bronfenbrenner [1974] who documents its effectiveness in the development of a child's early relationships, interests and language. The implication is that the child's experiential background is crucial at school-entry. The need for intervention for the culturally different child is evident. A study of joint reading between Black Head Start children and their mothers [Pelligrinni, 1990] revealed that while the mothers adjusted their level of teaching to the children's level of competence, the genre, not format, affected their teaching. The assumption here is that children's competence is determined by their interactions with a more competent adult. A family literacy program, "Even Start", under U.S. Public Law 100-297 [Hawkins, 1988], provides for parent-child communication with parents and children learning together. Several positive effects of Head Start and Follow-Through on the bilingual and minority child whose experience may be culturally different or lacking, support intervention. [Cole, 1986; Sandoval-Martinez, 1982; Stallings, 1986]

Current literature focuses on emergent literacy, and the role of experience in a child's development. An emergent literacy curriculum, activities and objectives, are linked to research on how young children learn to read and write. Theoretical principles include: [1] children's knowledge of the world and language determines the quality of meanings they construct when they read and write; [2] exposure to print helps children become aware of the opportunities for reading and writing;

[3] literacy is learned best when viewed as functional and useful; [4] exposure to literature read aloud promotes an awareness of text differences. In practice, first-hand and shared activities broaden children's experiential background, strengthen knowledge, vocabulary and the abiity to talk about what is known. [Strickland, 1990] A play environment which provides literacy enrichment confirms the effects on children's use of print in making sense of their experiences. [Neuman, 1990] Listening to stories is a strong factor in children's growth in use of language. [Feitelson, 1986] Of critical preschool concern is the fact that young children are expected to begin the process of literacy development before they enter school.

Research has indicated and led to the assumption that children come to kindergarten with a vast knowledge about reading and writing. [Freeman, 1989] The growing Whole Language approach beginning at school- entry points to language as an integral factor in learning. [NYSED, 1990] Correlating Whole Language and emergent literacy, in theory and practice, with the cumulative research on child development and learning, suggests cogent potential for application for programs and social policy.

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Lenore Sandel, Ed.D. Professor of Reading
Hofstra University
Hempstead, N Y 11550

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